Equality of Opportunity and Freedom from Discrimination

MHR Connections

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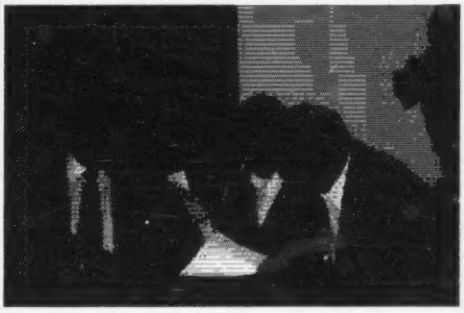
New Partnership to Promote Human and Treaty Rights



Deputy Chief Commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission David Langtry (left), Treaty Commissioner Dennis White Bird (centre) and Chairperson of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission Jerry Woods (right) sign the Memorandum of Understanding, which can be found on the MHRC website.

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission, the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba and the Canadian Human Rights Commission have entered into an innovative partnership to advance awareness and realization of human and treaty rights. This is the first time in Canada that these organizations have collaborated in this way.

The signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Agreement of the partnership took place on April 27, 2010 at the *Widokodadiwin - We All Work Together* "think tank" hosted by the three commissions. About fifty people from thirty-one organizations took part in the one-day meeting.

In his opening remarks, Chairperson Jerry Woods of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission said that the Commission has been raising awareness of human rights, responsibilities and protections in many communities and is aware of the unique difficulties facing First Nations and other Aboriginal people. "We are looking forward to suggestions from the community as to how we can do more to ensure their human rights are protected," he added.

Deputy Chief Commissioner David Langtry of the Canadian Human Rights Commission acknowledged that the situation currently faced by Aboriginal people in Canada is one of the most important human rights issues of today. "We recognize the need to do more," he said adding, "Collaborating with partners is another way of achieving increased awareness and advancing human rights." Mr. Langtry also talked about the Canadian Human Rights Commission's National Aboriginal Initiative, which has its office in Winnipeg. He said that the Commission has been working closely with the Aboriginal organizations whose members are affected by the repeal of Section 67 of the

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THE MANITOBA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

LA COMMISSION DES DROITS DE LA PERSONNE DU MANITOBA

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The Rights Connection
by Jerry Woods - Chairperson

It has been an honour working with the Treaty Relations Commission (TRC) over the past year. This relationship has culminated in a new partnership and a great opportunity to collaborate on raising awareness of both human and treaty rights.

You recently may have seen the campaign advanced by the TRC, "We Are All Treaty People." This inclusive campaign symbolizes both the mandate and the leadership of the TRC, by increasing public understanding of the Treaties and the Treaty relationship.

The idea behind this message is that when the Treaties were negotiated, they bestowed rights and responsibilities on both First Nations and Euro-Canadian settlers. Therefore, we are all treaty people.

For those who have not met or heard of the work of the TRC and its leader Dennis White Bird, allow me the opportunity to tell you about both.

The TRC, which came into being in 2005, has a mandate to engage in public education to improve understanding, to provide facilitation service for discussing Treaty issues, and to conduct independent research.

Since it opened its doors, their outreach activities have reached educators, RCMP and Winnipeg Police Service officers, politicians, bureaucrats, business professionals and both First Nation and non-First Nation students from the very young to the university level. It has taken on research projects, including the Manitoba Treaties Oral History Project and the Historical Atlas Project of First Nations in Manitoba.

It has successfully launched the TRC Learning Centre to engage school-age children in Treaty understanding.

The work of the TRC cannot be spoken about without acknowledging its leader Dennis White Bird. He has been a teacher, Chief of Rolling River First Nation, Regional Chief for the Manitoba Region of the Assembly of First Nations, and Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.

His dedication to the true spirit of the Treaty relationship and to the education of both First Nation and non-First Nation people is remarkable. He has said that understanding our human rights is a part of the Treaties, and that it is our responsibility to know them, live them and honour them.

I believe it is also our responsibility to know, understand and honour our Treaties and along with Treaty Commissioner White Bird, I hope everyone remembers that we are all Treaty people.

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Canadian Human Rights Act, which had prevented person living or working in First Nation communities from filing complaints of discrimination involving actions or decisions that were under the *Indian Act.*

Treaty Commissioner Dennis White Bird spoke about the mandate of the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba and its recent awareness campaign, "We Are All Treaty People." "About 75% of the public supports the campaign," he said, adding that some who do not, have voiced their discontent. He described one call from a man of Ukrainian descent who was upset about the campaign. Commissioner White Bird listened quietly and when asked by the man if he was still there, replied in Ukrainian, "How are you?" This opened a discussion where he could talk about how his people had supported early Ukrainian immigrants in surviving when they had first settled near his home community and about the historical relationship and friendship between the two peoples.

After the opening remarks, participants broke into working groups. In roundtable discussions, each group talked about which areas of human and treaty rights are least understood, the impediments to improving rights, areas of human and treaty rights that should be explored more broadly and the main areas of discrimination. The group discussions were reported in a plenary session and will also be summarized in a document that will be released next month.

Participants also heard a presentation from Brock Pitawanakwat of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He talked about the history of the residential school system and Government of Canada's attempt to assimilate Aboriginal children into mainstream culture by removing them from their families and forcing them to attend residential schools. He also spoke about the mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and some of its plans. He noted that Justice Murray Sinclair, chair of the Commission, had planned to attend *Widokodadiwin - We All Work Together* but was in New York addressing the United Nation's ninth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

The think tank took place at the Princess Street Campus of Red River College, and April Krahn, Manager of the Aboriginal Student Support and Community Relations spoke to participants about some of the College's programs.

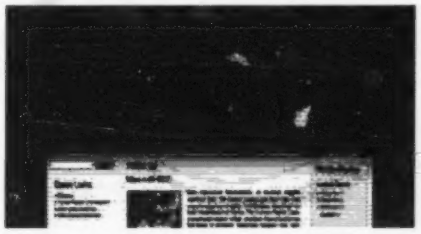
The Memorandum of Agreement of the partnership between the Manitoba Human Rights Commission, the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba and the Canadian Human Rights Commission is available on our website at: www.manitoba.ca/hrc

Northern students add their voices

At the last "Class Action: Rights Here, Rights Now Youth Conference" students met in Thompson and added their voices to the many public service announcements made over the year.

Commission launches new website

The address hasn't changed but the website has. "We are hoping that information on our new website is now more accessible, more helpful and easier to understand," says Manitoba Human Rights Commission's Communications Director Patricia Knipe.



The reliable standbys, like the MHR Connections Bulletin, news releases and human rights decisions are still available, but new to the site is human rights information for businesses and organizations including landlords, employers and service providers. Also, now available, are the public service announcement videos, which have been airing on local television stations. A new student centre, with information about youth conferences, youth rights and the public service announcements made by students during the year at the Commission's youth conferences, can now be seen by all students and teachers.

Other new pages include "Your Human Rights in Manitoba." Here visitors will find explanations as to what discrimination is, what reasonable accommodation is, what harassment is, what reprisal is and what is meant by discriminatory signs and statements. In the public education section, sample policies, guidelines and public reports and submissions can be found.

There are guides on how to file a complaint, and how to respond to a complaint. And for the first time, the Commission has developed "frequently asked questions") FAQs) to assist those unfamiliar with the work and processes of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission.

Ms Knipe says the idea behind the new website was not only to make visitors feel more welcome, but also to reflect much of the education and promotion work the Commission is involved in, along with the enforcement of *The Code*.

In Memory of Frieda Brandt-Brereton

Frieda Brandt-Brereton, a long-time employee of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission, passed away last month.

In 2000, Frieda retired from the Manitoba Human Rights Commission after over twenty years of service. Her colleagues will remember her as a d[illegible]cated, knowledgeable coworker who was always willing to help others.

Frieda had a beautiful smile and a ready laugh. She was a strong woman who loved and enjoyed her family. Her legacy will live on through the many people she touched in her lifetime.

The Commission sends its deepest condolences to Frieda's husband, Ron, children Lori, Kelly, Tom, Ron, Jo-Anne and their families.